

The Beatitudes Explained



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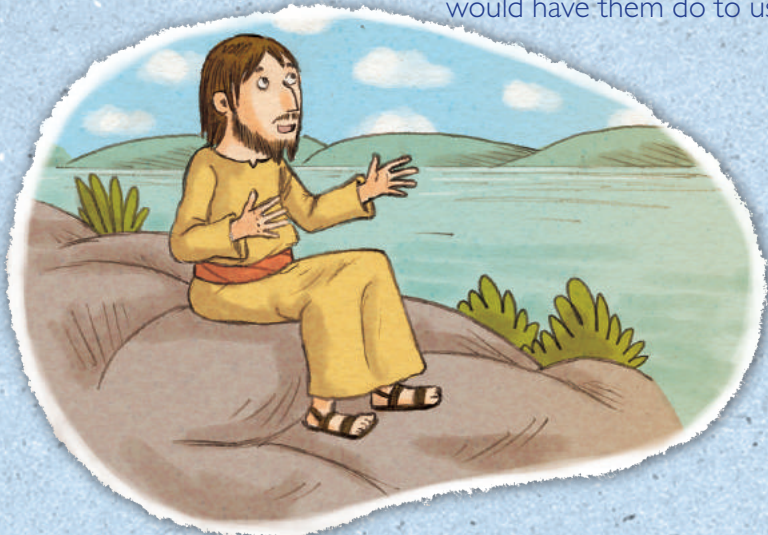
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The Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes are special blessings that Jesus gave. They are the gate through which we enter into Jesus' whole teaching. The Beatitudes help us understand and practice all that Jesus said and did. Although surprising and often challenging, they show us the way to live in happiness and God's blessing.

The Beatitudes are part of an **important** teaching of Jesus called the *Sermon on the Mount*. This teaching gathers together many of Jesus' sayings in one long passage. We find the Sermon on the Mount in chapters five through seven of Matthew's Gospel. It got its name because the evangelist describes Jesus preaching from a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

The Sermon on the Mount is an **essential part** of the New Testament. It includes Jesus' teaching on God's providence, the words of the Our Father, the command to love our neighbors and our enemies, and the "golden rule": to do to others as we would have them do to us.



To Whom Was Jesus Speaking?

With the Beatitudes, Jesus announced the **kingdom of God** to all people. He had come to proclaim God's kingdom through his words and deeds. Some of Jesus' listeners had already left everything behind—home, family, and work—to become his followers. Others came because they were attracted by his message of hope and wanted to understand it better. Still others were curious; something in their hearts told them that Jesus was unique and a teacher unlike others they had heard before.

A New Kind of Rabbi!

Jesus was sitting when he gave his sermon. This fact is important. **Being seated and speaking** while surrounded by one's disciples was something that Jewish rabbis of the time did. This posture shows that Jesus was taking on the role of a teacher. The people of his day immediately recognized Jesus as a teacher who spoke with authority.

Yet Jesus was different from other teachers of his time. He did not teach in one location, like a school, or gather his disciples in a particular place to instruct them. Instead, Jesus moved from village to village.

It was also customary at that time for students to choose a suitable teacher and present themselves to him. Jesus did the opposite. He took the initiative and called his disciples. Jesus not only called those who were educated but also common people too, like Simon and Andrew who were fishermen or Matthew who was a tax collector.

Jesus' words are meant for everyone. They have the power to speak to every heart. But in this sermon Jesus appeals to **those who already want to follow him**. He speaks to the men, women, and children of every time who are his disciples.



Another thing that made Jesus different from other teachers is that he welcomed women as disciples. Jesus allowed women to sit at his feet and learn from him along with men. Numerous women were followers of Jesus; they used their financial resources to support his ministry. Other teachers of the time did not have female disciples, since teaching women was prohibited.

There is one last difference between Jesus and other rabbis of his day. Often those who followed a teacher hoped to one day become the teacher themselves. Jesus did not teach so that others would become "masters" over their brothers and sisters, but so that all would learn to serve and love one another.

"But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. . . . Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:8, 10–11).

The Beatitudes

Here is the text from Matthew's Gospel, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. . . .’”

(Matthew 5:1–12)

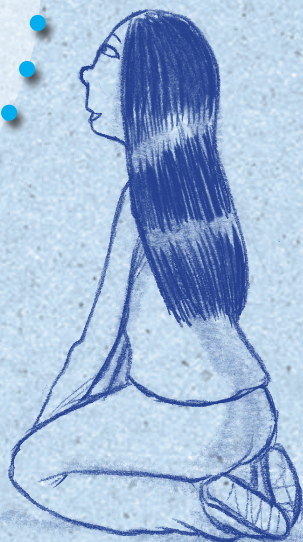
We begin our discovery of the **Beatitudes** not just for the sake of knowing more about our faith. We want the words of Jesus to be imprinted on our hearts and shine their light in our lives.

After each beatitude, you will find space for your thoughts and questions on the **Notebook** pages. The reflections on these pages can help you consider what you have read.

1st Beatitude

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Blessed are those whose hearts do not seek power or possessions. Blessed are those who know how to wait. Blessed are those with open hearts, who know they need God and who seek him in prayer. Blessed are those who draw from the font of true, living water.



1st

A Special Poverty



The first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” plays an important role. It introduces and sets **the tone for the Beatitudes** that follow. In one sense, it summarizes them.

With this first beatitude, Jesus promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit. But what does it mean to be poor in spirit? In Luke’s Gospel we find two simple statements: “Blessed are you who are poor” is followed by “woe to you who are rich.”

Jesus never went easy on those who were rich. Instead, he stressed how difficult it was for a rich

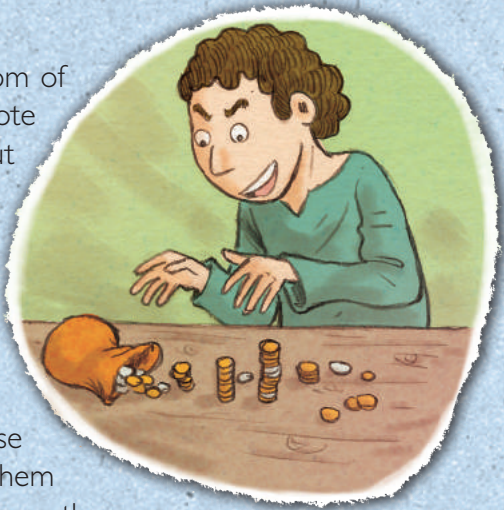
The Anawim and Waiting for Happiness

At the time of Jesus many people suffered from poverty. Jesus himself was poor. It is interesting then that Jesus taught that poverty can be a source of happiness. What did he mean by this? Jesus wanted us to learn how trusting our lives to God’s care brings us joy.

In the Bible the Hebrew word used to speak about the poor is **anawim**. This word means those who are poor, humble, and downtrodden. It can also mean those who rely completely on God and not on their own strength.

The **anawim** are people without material means who continue to believe in God; they wait with trust for him to keep his word. Among God’s poor, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is a shining example. In fact, Pope Francis says that gospel joy comes from a poor heart just like the Blessed Mother’s. Hers is a heart that rejoices and marvels at all that God has done for her.

person to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is important to note that Jesus never spoke about wealth and poverty in an **abstract way**; instead, he talked about people's behavior regarding wealth and poverty.



The rich people whom Jesus warns are those whose many possessions make them feel powerful. They fail to see the needs of others. Such people are too attached to worldly possessions and do not know how to share. **Wealth then becomes an obstacle** to following Jesus and living a good life. At the same time, however, Jesus does not say that being materially poor guarantees that a person is good.

Poverty of spirit opens in us a space for waiting. We wait for the happiness that God desires and wishes to fulfill for us.

